



Randy Weese doing yard work and teaching staunchness to Pilot.



ASK THE PRO

behavior on the line

By Jerry and Jane Patopea

Question: What can I do about my dog whining and barking on line and when he's sent for a retrieve?

MANY OF OUR REALLY GOOD DOGS develop the undesirable habit of giving voice in the holding blind and on line while the birds are being shot and when released to retrieve. These are usually dogs loaded with desire to retrieve, not necessarily tough, unruly, willful dogs, just high-powered, overconfident, developing field champions who are not in control of their emotions.

Frustration, caused by lack of discipline, steadying too early, or not steadying at all, and too much bird stimulation too early in life and training are some primary causes. It takes far more emotional control than most people realize for a dog to be a truly quiet non-slip retriever.

Developing a quiet retriever is easier than quieting a barking retriever, and there are some fundamentals that really help. Most of our dogs with

good bloodlines have generations of desire built in to them, so they naturally love to retrieve. We just need to develop the habits we want to see them have as retrievers.

For starters, encompass a structured time each day as well as a retrieving time. Have a little obedience lesson each day from the time the pup is very young so he learns controlled behavior early.

When retrieving, have your throwers visible enough to the dog that they don't need to make much noise to get the dog's attention. Then have them throw with no noise or just a little voice so the dog doesn't get overly excited and lose control. We never use a starter pistol with a pup until he has good manners on the line because that tends to drive a pup over the top with desire, and that makes teaching more difficult.

Develop a proper puppy position and focus in relation to the gun and thrower early in their retrieving life by helping the pup gain and maintain that position through your guidance. This means gently developing a staunch dog by holding him in the right manner so he watches the throw without fighting.

Keeping your throwers low-key aids in this. We frequently have the gunners be totally quiet as they throw. If the pup has spotted the gunner there is no need for him to holler or shoot. The pup will see the throw

and develop better control of himself if there is no big “hey hey” or shot from the gunner, and it will be easier for him to follow the arc if he’s not struggling.

Some puppies get more and more amped up with each retrieve, so limit their retrieves. If he begins to struggle harder and becomes less manageable, stop throwing marks for the day and do something to develop structure.

Developing structure is very important in preventing a voice problem. The ratio of free retrieving time to structure developing time is often out of balance in a puppy’s upbringing. Puppies all want to retrieve and we love to watch them retrieve, and retrieve and retrieve. Often, we are developing a maniac who becomes uncontrollable or a dog that just seems to collapse at any sign of pressure so we are hesitant to actually make him do anything he doesn’t like. Teaching in small segments and keeping the outside stimulus to a manageable level both help develop a dog that likes to learn and trusts his trainer, so he becomes comfortable learning, and he becomes capable of handling stress.

Birds are stress. Throwers are stress. Marks are stress. Field trials are stress. This is not bad stress, but it is stress, and if the pup has too much stimulus he loses control of his developing emotions. This is a big reason why he may start giving voice around his retrieving, whether it is walking to line, sitting in a holding blind, watching the birds go down, or when he’s sent. The stimulus is too high. He can’t handle it yet. So we do a lot of developing proper behavior with less stimulus, so we can teach proper technique with a more balanced animal, and we build methods of reinforcement and skills to be used in managing a dog as he matures. Proper basics teach a lot more than a few drills and hand signals. They teach proper behavior and how to learn and respond to pressure should that proper behavior break down with too much stimulus, like a flyer overhead.

So, by developing proper line manners through guidance and a limited amount of stimulus in the field; and simultaneously developing better reinforcement and skills in the yard to counter undesirable behavior when it arises, we can develop a tractable dog with experience retrieving under control, building a habit of proper behavior, and a feeling that he is part of a team. He is not in this alone nor is he performing just for himself. The basics also give you a means to develop him further in the field, and a way to direct him to a bird should he miss it.

Any noise while retrieving should be stopped right then and there. A pup may start whining as early as a leash walk or while holding or fetch-



Jane Patopea guides pups.

ing. This is not an acceptable behavior. Learning the command “quiet” should be taught early and reinforced so the word quiet is not a request, but a command to be obeyed. A proper sit command can really help here.

“Sit” is the most important command of all, and a command most dogs learn sloppily and is often poorly reinforced. Sit should be taught early in life to mean sit and don’t move. “Sit and don’t move” needs to be shaped and then reinforced along every step of training for months and months. Years, actually. Years of unbroken attention. It’s the most important command of all and often the first command to breakdown during periods of resistance or heightened stimulus like a flyer in the face, or a large group training session or a field trial.

Field trials should be totally avoided until there is no sign of voice while training with birds in a group. Training with birds and guns in a group should be avoided completely until there is no voice while training alone and in the yard. Training alone or in small groups where the level of bird/ gunner stimulation can be controlled leads to better development and less pressure on the dog as he is learning proper habits.

This is often harder on the handler than on the dog, because it takes serious attention and management to teach and maintain the sit command. Serious, unbroken attention to develop serious, unbroken attention and response does not happen at a field trial, and field trials are where most people want to be.

“Sit and don’t move” is the backbone of having a quiet dog on line. Developing this early and deeply in the yard prevents most problems in the field and allows teaching without pressure to prevail, and ultimately provides years of field trials with a well-started dog.

For instance, if a dog whines in the holding blind, or barks when being released and you are at a field trial, there is little you can do and you are teaching him to bark or whine by allowing it, thereby frustrating and probably shortening his field trial career.

However, if you are training and he is whining or barking, he is likely moving around some, and the sit command can be reinforced, indirectly quieting him. If he whines online, or far worse, barks on line, he can be reinforced to sit, as he is probably moving some in the process of barking. If he whines or barks while leaving on a retrieve, he can be stopped on a sit command and reheeled, then resent, or have the bird re-thrown and sent again. He will learn through attrition the proper habit of silence while retrieving, and that is the best way.

We never correct with an e-collar for barking or whining on line or while retrieving. Let me say that again.



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We NEVER correct with an e-collar for barking or whining on line or while retrieving. This just seems to amplify the problem. Frustration barking begins in a landslide and is very hard to deal with when birds are present. Indirectly stopping the barking or whining by recalling and resending works well with time and diligence, and with a minimum amount of pressure, and ultimately with most dogs.

Time and diligence and patience with proper setups where there is not overwhelming pressure of birds and guns and hollering, and simply stopping the dog on a sit command and recalling to line and sending again if voice is ever heard will prevent a voice problem before it ever begins, if it is accompanied with proper foundation work in the yard.

If you are already experiencing deeper problems like your dog barking in the field, or barking while swimming, or barking on a whistle stop, or barking on a cast, you may have to wait for another deeper article. It's best to start early. ■

This article is dedicated to Randy Weese for his timely appearance at Utopia Retriever Kennel and his dedication to his dogs.

Utopia Retrievers Jerry and Jane Patopea

Jerry started training field trial retrievers with professional trainer Bert Carlson when he was 13. He also trained with John Luther, Russ Hallowell, and Paul Shoemaker during high school. He then went to work for Ed Minoggie for five years before starting on his own. He has been training full time ever since. His first field champion was Angeliqne in 1973. In 1976 he spent a one-year tutorial with Rex Carr. He has trained many field champions since, including one high point derby dog, two Purina award winners, three high point open dogs, and two National Amateur dogs in Canada. Jane trained obedience dogs and horses while studying veterinary medicine on the side before training retrievers. Her love of veterinary medicine has never dwindled. She trained several field champions and finished many Nationals in Canada, and won the 1994 National Amateur there with her dog FTCH NAFTCH FC Free Trade, as well as being the secretary of the National Retriever Club of Canada for 10 years before migrating south. They both still love training field trial dogs every day.

"Ask the Pro" is written by a member of the Professional Retriever Trainers Association. www.prta.net

